

## **Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Full Commission Meeting**

**May 12, 1999**

**Commission members present:** Doug Beighle, Peter Bennett, Commissioner Ted Bottiger, Don Briscoe, Greg Devereux, Roger Dormaier, Councilmember Dave Earling, Representative Ruth Fisher, Jim Fitzgerald, Governor Booth Gardner, Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, Robert Helsell, Doug Hurley, Peter Hurley, Commissioner Bettie Ingham, Jennifer Joly, Representative Maryann Mitchell, Tomio Moriguchi, Charles Mott, Representative Ed Murray, Connie Niva, Commissioner Patricia Notter, Patricia Otley, Mike Roberts, Skip Rowley, Representative Karen Schmidt, Senator George Sellar, Ken Smith, Commissioner Judie Stanton, Dale Stedman, Commissioner Judy Wilson

**Commission members not present:**

Rick Bender, Bob Dilger, Arthur D. Jackson, Jr., John Kelly, Bill Lampson, Senator Valoria Loveland, Councilmember Richard McIver, Neil Peterson, Larry Pursley, John Rindlaub, Senator Dino Rossi

### **Business Meeting**

**Chairman's report.** Chairman Doug Beighle opened the meeting and the summary notes of the January 14, 1999 Commission meeting were accepted by consensus.

Chairman Beighle introduced the topic agenda for the afternoon, cross-cutting issues among the three policy committees. He asked Commissioner Dave Earling to introduce the first topic.

### **Issue Highlight -- Puget Sound Congestion**

#### ***Sound Transit Investment Plans***

Commissioner Dave Earling reminded members that in 1996 the three-county Puget Sound region authorized a \$3.9 billion program of regional transit services and capital improvements. He introduced Sound Transit Executive Director Bob White. Mr. White described the Sound Transit district and said it is divided into five subareas, each of which is making investments based on the revenues generated in the subarea. Sound Transit is governed by a Board of city and county elected officials appointed by the County Executives. The benefits of the Sound Move plan are improved travel times and service to major activity centers. Transit carries 20% to 40% of the people in the most congested corridors during peak travel periods. Sound Transit will increase mobility choices, enhance the mix of modes and reduce congestion at peak times.

Three modes are included in the plan. Regional express consists of new express bus routes, HOV direct access ramps and community connections such as park and ride lots and transit centers.

Commuter rail will run on existing BNSF tracks from Everett to Lakewood. Light rail will be built in two segments: a Tacoma segment and a University District to SeaTac segment. The funding consists of voter approved local sales and MVET taxes, federal funds and bonds. There is no state funding.

The implementation challenges include building a new regional governance model; ensuring strong public accountability and incorporating new approaches to doing business such as maintaining a small staff infrastructure and using a performance-based compensation system.

**Question: There is a perception that with the \$4 billion plan all transit needs have been taken care of. Is this true?** There is increasing demand and only a portion of the region's transit expenditures are going to improvements in service. Several billion are already spent operating and maintaining the current levels of service. This supplements the existing infrastructure.

**Question: How will all the different bus services be coordinated?** In September Sound Transit will begin delivering bus service on the new routes. A coordinated service plan is being developed and a single bus pass will be available that riders can use on any bus in the region.

### ***Reduce Congestion Now***

Chairman Beighle next introduced Kemper Freeman, President of Kemper Development Company and a former state legislator. Mr. Freeman began by citing polls that he said indicate that 66% of Puget Sound's population feel congestion is the region's worst problem. A year ago he hired Bill Eager of TDA Inc. to answer three questions: 1) what would it take to reduce congestion by 25%, 2) how could mobility be improved, and 3) how could we boost performance and reduce costs. Mr. Eager conducted a study that found that by increasing lane miles in the region by 4%, all three goals could be met. He asked Mr. Eager to describe his study.

Mr. Eager said his study covered Snohomish, King and Pierce Counties. It found that travel demand is growing faster than population; the number of occupants per vehicle is declining; and no one in the region is charged with improving mobility. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan says that unless people change their behavior, mobility will get worse. The MTP assigns over half of public transportation dollars to transit. According to the Texas Transportation Institute, Puget Sound's congestion index is 1.2 or 20% over capacity. A 25% reduction would get the level of congestion to .9 or back to what it was in the early 1980s. The increased mobility would serve almost 40% more trips.

According to Mr. Eager, to accomplish this, the region must: complete the financially constrained state highway plan; continue to boost the efficiency of the system using ITS and other means; and add 4% to the lane miles of roads in the region. This would require adding 700 lane miles to the freeways and expressways and 700 line miles to the arterials. Together these roadways carry 65% of the travel. It is not true that "you cannot build your way out of congestion" -- the vehicle miles traveled have increased 68% since 1980, but our lane miles have barely grown. He said investment in the roadway system has been neglected.

There is also a need to boost the efficiency of the system. HOV lanes could be converted to HOT lanes or used in peak periods only; we should also examine the processes that have allowed our cost per lane mile to exceed national averages by two and one-half times. The cost of the new lane miles would be \$12.8 billion if Washington state figures were used; but only \$6 billion if the 50-state average were used.

**Q: Did you look at the right-of-way issues? Is the land there?** So far we have taken only the macro look. We are now starting to look at the details.

**Q: How do you get from a 4% increase in lane miles to 40% more trips?** The 4% is primarily on the freeway and arterial system on which you actually increase lane miles by 35%.

**Q: If freeways, expressways and arterials comprise 12% of the 32,000 lane miles, that is 3,840 lane miles. You would be adding lanes to fully one-third of the principal roads. That is correct.**

**Q: You are proposing to spend another \$2 billion per year on top of the \$1.2 billion we are already spending and the \$2.7 billion in the constrained plan.** So far we have only looked at the added increment of capital cost.

Asked to offer lessons learned to the Blue Ribbon Commission, Mr. Freeman suggested in exchange for asking the public for more money, it is essential to offer them something that can work. He suggested looking hard at why it costs so much more to build here. Mr. White suggested having a specific plan that can move forward. He said focusing on specifics would be critical. He agreed that more roadway capacity was needed. Also more partnerships will help move solutions forward.

## **Reports from Committees**

**Investment Strategies Committee.** Chairman Dale Stedman reported that his committee has been learning about the problem of congestion; about maintenance and preservation; and about why needs exceed funding. The statewide needs are \$105 billion over 20 years; funding is half that. The committee plans to hear about transit in June. Future topics include land use and transportation and economic development. The committee is using a set of criteria that includes the following: does it fix the critical problems first; is it cost-effective; does it produce measurable change; is it acceptable to the public.

**Revenue Committee.** Chairman Skip Rowley said his committee had been learning about all levels of transportation funding in the state. He offered the following preliminary themes that the committee had discussed: The transportation funding system is complicated and difficult for the layperson to understand. The funding system has been devised with the best of intentions a piece at a time over many decades to meet specific purposes, problems, political realities and compromises. It may be time

to develop a comprehensive new rationale as a system. The public feels it already pays a lot, and yet all parts of the system feel they suffer from insufficient funding levels. As a layperson, it is very hard to tell whether the allocation of funds to jurisdictions and to functions appropriately meets the needs of each. For these reasons, it is no surprise the public does not support new revenues. Until the funding system can be made more comprehensible as a whole to the public, it will be most difficult to build public support or persuade the legislature that it should pass new revenue measures.

Mr. Rowley stated that all options are still on the table and committee members were open to discussing them. Did the committee feel there was truth in all of the presentations? Not necessarily. The numbers are enormous and the solutions will surely have to be in all of the modes.

**Administration Committee.** Chairman Doug Hurley said the committee's work plan included examining four topic areas: permitting, fragmentation in governance, alternative delivery systems and efficiencies. So far the committee has looked at the first two. In the permitting area, the committee heard about recent efforts to study the issues and make progress on reinventing environmental processes. Under the governance topic, the committee has heard about reform models from other places, including San Diego, Vancouver, Michigan and New Zealand. Next the committee will turn to alternative delivery systems.

### **Case Studies of Key Issues**

Chairman Beighle introduced the session by stating that the purpose of the cases was to illustrate issues the committees have been dealing with, not to debate the merits of the specific projects.

#### ***Case Study 1: Trans-Valley Corridor, King County***

Tim Hatley, Executive Assistant to County Executive Ron Sims, opened by describing the Trans-Valley corridor. It spans six jurisdictions and four urban centers that include a population of 150,000 and 173,000 jobs. It already has the highest concentration of travel in south King County. The surrounding area is zoned for an additional 8,000 housing units. A major proposed development would preserve 400 acres of open space in exchange for 560 units of housing. A concurrency certificate has been granted but the cumulative impacts have not been fully addressed in the required mitigation. Project costs are \$147 million of which only about \$55 million are in hand. For this growing region, the issue is that GMA required joint planning, but not joint implementation. There is no requirement to consider the impact on the four cities, although the parties are working together voluntarily.

Connie Niva, representing the Administration Committee, said corridors have been a discussion issue at the Transportation Commission level. But no one entity is responsible. Voluntary partnerships have been tried and the committee has also examined reform models that appear promising. The voluntary cooperation can be moved forward using dollars as the incentive.

Ted Bottiger, of the Investment Committee, noted that the land use issue has been discussed by the committee. The corridor concept has also been of interest to this committee, although he wondered why the corridor had not been extended past 180th to its end. Other issues that the committee examined included safety, congestion and cost-effectiveness of various solutions.

Judy Wilson, of the Revenue Committee, noted that her committee had not come up with the funding solution yet; the reality might be that roads may not be a priority in how funds get allocated. Local jurisdictions have separate funding “buckets” and they compete against each other for the same grants. The committee is looking at policies of how the buckets are distributed and whether it might be time to broaden the funding options. There is a need to find more reliable and timely ways to fund projects.

**Q: How did the voluntary partnership process work?** It started with the Executive participating in a series of regional transportation summits with localities in King County. They had identified common needs and competing priorities.

**Q: This all works by volunteerism -- can these problems be attacked with a political solution?** Sometimes volunteerism just doesn’t work, for example SR 522. Also the Growth Management Planning Council is in a problematic state. There is a need for a single point of accountability. A member from another region noted that not all parts of the state are having these problems. In some areas the voluntary partnerships work very well, but what is needed is a regional or corridor-based funding source.

**Q: How many corridors are there in King County and how many cities are participating?** The first Regional Arterial Network was proposed in 1984 and identified dozens of major corridors. When the 40 cities are invited to a summit, 12 to 15 will show up.

**Q: Do you want the state to legislate the corridor approach?** What’s key is the money. Also deadlines, because too much time allows agreements to come apart. In Sidney, Australia, they give them a deadline and also allow the state to preempt local governments if they won’t work together.

### ***Case Study 2: SR 395 North-South Corridor, Spokane***

Chris Marr, businessman from Spokane and state Transportation Commissioner, introduced the project by saying it provides a missing link in SR 395 that extends from the Canadian border to the southwest and is a major economic corridor. Currently three miles of the corridor goes down Division Street in downtown Spokane. The two-phase project would create a limited access highway. Funding depends on a constant stream of TEA-21 federal funds and R-49 state funds to be realized. The benefits of the project are travel time savings, reduction in accidents, air quality improvement and enabling redevelopment of a low income neighborhood. It also reduces traffic on city streets and reduces city maintenance and preservation costs.

Judie Stanton, of the Administration Committee, noted that the case illustrates the fragmentation issue since authority for making the project happen is split. The city, county, state and MPO get involved as well as neighborhoods and local institutions. Permitting is a big issue. The EIS took 6 years to get approved.

Patti Otley, representing the Investment Committee, said her committee has dealt with the trade-offs that occur such as maintenance over mobility, whether state funding should be used to enhance regional development, whether different cost-benefit criteria should be applied because population is lower and whether the state should prioritize projects to take advantage of federal dollars. The committee has also examined which criteria should be highest, e.g. freight mobility, multi-modalism, compatibility with land use plans, safety, air quality and so on.

Roger Dormaier, of the Revenue Committee, described the funding sources used including 80% federal funding and state funds from the Special Category C fund that has a dedicated share of the gas tax. The project has been called a pork barrel project yet it is very important to the east side of the state. The corridor carries heavily loaded trucks that currently generate wear and tear of city streets. It is important to the economy of the region to keep the freight moving.

**Q: What other funding sources are being used?** FHA border crossing funds, FAST corridor funds and earmarked demonstration funds from Congress. There is a hope that the Commission will recommend some form of corridor funding.

Chairman Beighle summarized the case studies by saying they offered a first taste of how the issues of all three committees can be pulled together.

### **Public Comment Period**

Donald Williams, citizen of Gig Harbor, said he uses the Tacoma Narrows Bridge daily and has followed the Public-Private Initiatives program for 6 years. Five or six projects were killed due to opposition to tolls, but this one was being jammed down the community's throat. In western Pierce County, 83% of those voting in the advisory ballot opposed it. He urged the Commission to revamp the PPI program.

The meeting adjourned at 3:50 pm.